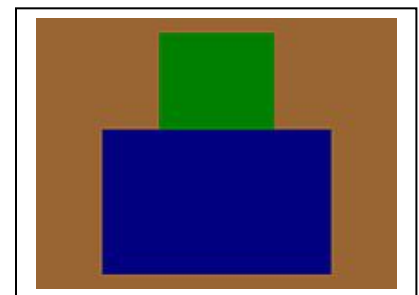


**Private Cyril Bishop (Number 405603) of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (*Eastern Ontario*), Canadian Expeditionary Force, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated in the stone of the Canadian National Memorial which stands on Vimy Ridge.**

**His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a book-keeper, Cyril Bishop may have been the young man who took ship from his native Newfoundland on August 9 of 1911. He sailed from Port aux Basques to North Sydney, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, from where he made his way to Toronto. (This information requires confirmation.)**



**(continued)**

(Previous page: *The image of the shoulder-flash of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Eastern Ontario) is from the Wikipedia Web-site.*)

His attestation records show that Cyril Bishop claimed to have had previous military experience with the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Canadian Militia which had come into being less than a year before\*. However, the records also show that upon enlistment he was drafted into the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion. While having been mobilized in Toronto, the unit was obviously active elsewhere as well since it was at Camp Niagara at Niagara-on-the-Lake that Cyril Bishop underwent his medical examination on June 3, was approved for service on June 4, and was attested one day later again, on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

According to perhaps what was his first medical report, he had apparently already enlisted just days before, in Toronto, on May 29, 1915. Upon enlistment Private Bishop had then likely been ordered to Camp Niagara, not only to complete formalities, but because that was where the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion was apparently based and was to train before leaving the country for overseas service\*\*.

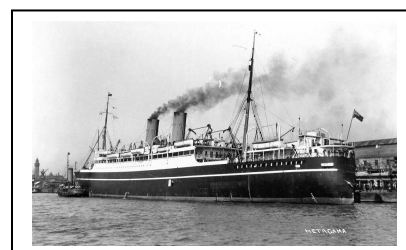
*\*But, whatever that experience may have been, it is not to be found among Private Bishop's documentation.*

*\*\*According to the Niagara Historical Society Museum web-site – also responsible for some of the above information – some fourteen-thousand recruits were trained at Camp Niagara during the Great War.*

In fact, Private Bishop's attestation appears to have become official on that June 5 as it was then that the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel F.C. McCordick, declared – on paper – that... *having been finally approved and inspected by me this day... I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

His medical examination apparently did not diagnose that he was to suffer a few days afterwards from tonsillitis, but Private Bishop was hospitalized at Camp Niagara on June 17 for medical attention to this complaint. The date on which he was released from treatment seems not to be documented – possibly July 1(?).

It was not to be until the autumn of that year that Private Bishop's Battalion took ship for the trans-Atlantic passage to the United Kingdom. The unit boarded the chartered Canadian Pacific vessel RMS *Metagama*\* in Montreal on October 16, 1915, the ship sailing on that day. She docked in the English south-coast naval port of Plymouth-Devonport on the 25<sup>th</sup>.



Private Bishop and his Battalion were not to sail alone on board *Metagama*; they had at least the 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery to accompany them.

*\*Apparently although often carrying Canadian troops in its third-class accommodation, Canadian Pacific's Metagama – unlike many larger vessels - was never requisitioned by the government to serve as a troop transport.*

(Right above: *The photograph of RMS Metagama is from the Old Ship Pictures Galleries Web-Site.*)

In the meantime, Private Bishop had more problems with his tonsils. He was once more admitted into hospital, again because of tonsillitis, on this occasion into the Military Hospital at the fledgling Canadian military complex being established in the vicinity of the villages of Bramshott and Liphook in the southern county of Hampshire. From there he was discharged on December 11.



Only some two weeks later – on December 27 – Private Bishop was back in hospital - No. 2 Military Hospital, Bramshott - for treatment for influenza and for congested lungs.

(Right above: *Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016*)

It was to be a month before he was once more transferred. On January 28 of the New Year, 1916, Private Bishop was forwarded to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital, Bearwood, Wokingham, where he remained until discharged *to duty* with his unit now at Shorncliffe, in the vicinity of the English-Channel town and harbour of Folkestone.

(Right: *Little remains of Shorncliffe Military Camp today apart from a barracks occupied by Gurkha troops. The Military Cemetery almost alone serves as a reminder of the events of a century ago. – photograph from 2016*)



He reported there on February 25 or 26. By that time his 35th Battalion, now designated as the 35<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Reserve) Battalion, had left Bramshott to join the Canadian Training Division based at Shorncliffe.

(Right: *A view of the coastal town of Folkestone almost a century later as seen from the white cliffs of nearby Dover – photograph from 2009*)



On April 1-2, 1916, Private Bishop proceeded overseas again, this voyage comprising the short distance across the English Channel to the Continent – and likely via the ports of Folkestone and Boulogne. Upon its debarkation in France, his detachment was sent to the Canadian Infantry Base Depot at Le Havre where it reported on the same April 2.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> he was officially attached to his new unit, the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (*Eastern Ontario*). The files record that he was one of the re-enforcement draft to leave the Depot on April 18, to join the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion already in the field.



(Right above: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(continued)

Private Bishop, according to his documents, reported *to duty* two days later, on April 20 – the Battalion War Diary makes no mention of re-enforcements on this day when the unit was on its way back to the front line near Voormezele.

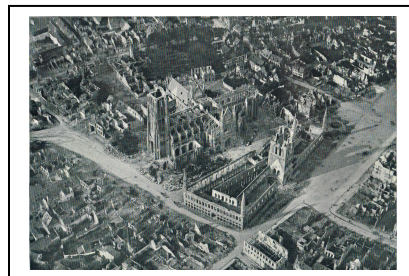
\* \* \* \* \*

The 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (*Eastern Ontario*) had been on the Continent since September 15 of 1915, as a component of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, itself an element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. Having passed through Folkestone and the French port of Boulogne, the Battalion had immediately been posted to Flanders, southern Belgium, where it had served in a sector to the south of the city of Ypres (today Ieper).



(Right above: *The French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

(Right: *A Belgian aerial photograph showing the devastation of Ypres in 1915 – the city is described as ‘morte’ (dead) – from Illustration*)



During the succeeding months the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion followed the routine of life in the trenches, an existence which was divided into tours in the front lines followed by - or preceded by – time in the support lines just behind the front, and postings to the various reserve camps.

The latter occasions were opportunities for training, lectures, inspections by the upper echelons – usually the further away from the front, the more important the visitor – route marches, sports, with perhaps the odd entertainment organized by the troops themselves.

Of course, things were never quite as neat and tidy as set out in the preceding format and troops could find themselves in a certain position at times for weeks on end.

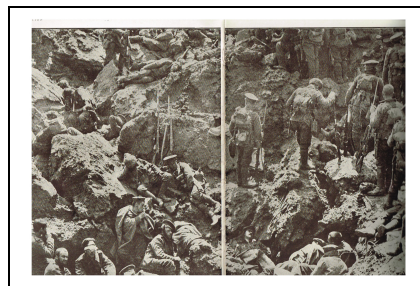
(Right: *A photograph of Canadian troops in support positions somewhere on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, only months earlier having been equipped with those steel helmets and the less-obvious British-made Lee-Enfield rifles – from Illustration*)



In the forward areas life was monotonous, if at times inevitably dangerous: there were parties of the construction, wiring and carrying variety. Patrolling and raids on a local scale were often the norm, as were rat-catching and lice hunts. Most casualties – discounting those due to disease - were caused by enemy artillery - occasionally one’s own – although snipers were also a constant danger.

(continued)

Thus were spent the months of the late autumn and winter of 1915-1916. On March 27, however, the British attacked the German positions near the village of St-Éloi after having detonated a series of a half-a-dozen mines under the enemy positions. The craters created by the explosions rendered the terrain unrecognizable and impassable – the British attackers struggled with the ground, the weather and the Germans for six days before being relieved by the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.



(Right above: *A mine crater purportedly in the British sector in the area of St-Éloi: they proved in many cases to be obstacles to the operations they were intended to facilitate. – from Illustration*)

The Canadian newcomers fared no better than the British: for three days they stood in cold water and fought, all the time raked by the German artillery. On April 6 the enemy attacked and re-took most of the little ground that had been captured. The fighting continued in the same manner for the next eleven days – the German artillery growing ever stronger all the time – until it was decided that further attacks would only result in more of the same. The action came to an official end on April 17, by which time the Canadian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had incurred some fifteen-hundred casualties.

During the confrontation, on April 8, the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion had moved into the area of Crater Number 2 and the old German front line and had attempted to bomb (*grenade*) the then-current enemy positions. A bayonet party had been no more successful and the casualty count was thirty-six *killed* and *wounded*. Trying to establish a post in Number 2 Crater on the next day only added a further twenty-nine to the total.

After a further day the unit was relieved and retired behind the lines; for the personnel of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion the action at the St-Éloi Craters was over. Nine days later again, at four o'clock in the morning of April 20, it relieved the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion in the line near Voormezele.

This was apparently the time and place when and where Private Bishop reported *to duty*, but *exactly* where is not clear – perhaps in the Battalion transport lines or at Headquarters behind the forward area.

\* \* \* \* \*

Only some six weeks later, from June 2 to 14, it was to be the Canadians of the Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division - it having been posted to the lethal *Ypres Salient* - which was engaged in the desperate fighting at, and in the vicinity of, *Mount Sorrel*. Units other than those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division were to play a role also; however, judging from the entries of that period drawn from the Battalion War Diary, the 21<sup>st</sup> was not one of them.



(Right above: *The Canadian memorial which stands atop Mount Sorrel just to the south-west of the city of Ypres (today Ieper) whose spires and towers may be perceived in the distance. – photograph from 1914*)

(Right: *Remnants of Canadian trenches dating from 1915-1916 at Sanctuary Wood – photograph from 2010*)

On August 22 the Battalion was withdrawn from the front in Belgium. Eight days later it marched out of Belgium to the area of the northern French commune of Zouafques, a dozen or so kilometres from the coast and near to the coastal town of Calais, where a training area had been established.



The unit remained there until September 5 when Private Bishop and his comrades-in-arms marched to Audruicq some eight kilometres distant, there to board a train for the journey south. Their destination was Auxi le Chateau from where they were to march a further sixty kilometres to arrive on September 9 at the large British military camp at the Brickfields (*la Briqueterie*) in close proximity to the provincial town of Albert – and within the range of the German guns.

The *1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme* had by that time been ongoing for some two months. It had begun with the disastrous attack of July 1, an assault which had cost the British Army fifty-seven thousand casualties – in the short span of only four hours - of which some nineteen thousand dead.

On that first day all but two small units of the attacking divisions had been from the British Isles, the exceptions being the two-hundred men of the Bermuda Rifles who were serving in the Lincolnshire Regiment, and the eight-hundred personnel of the *1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment* which lost so heavily on that day at Beaumont-Hamel.

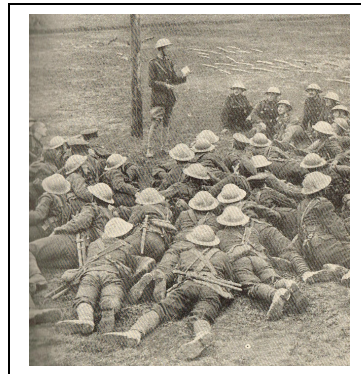
(Right below: *The Canadian Memorial which stands to the side of the Albert-Bapaume Road near the village of Courcellette – photograph from 2015*)

As the battle had progressed, troops from the Empire (*Commonwealth*) were brought in; at first it had been the South African Brigade (July 15), then the Australians and New Zealanders (July 23) before the Canadians entered the fray on August 30 to become part of a third general offensive. Their first major collective contribution was to be in the area of the two villages of Flers and Courcellette.



(Right: *An image purporting to be that of a Canadian officer giving instructions to the troops under his command prior to the attack at Flers-Courcellette, September 1916. – from The War Illustrated*)

Having arrived as planned at Brickfields Camp on September 9, Private Bishop's Battalion remained in the area of Albert until the 14<sup>th</sup> when it moved forward in readiness for the offensive planned for the following day. By two o'clock in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, the unit was in its positions astride the Albert-Bapaume Road.



(continued)

(Right below: *Canadian soldiers at work in Albert, the already-damaged basilica in the background* – from *Illustration*)

At twenty minutes after six the artillery began to lay down a creeping barrage which the infantry followed. The first line of enemy trenches was taken with apparently little resistance. However, from that point on, the German machine-gunners, artillery and snipers began to exact their toll.

Incurring heavy losses at times, the Battalion – according to its War Diary – had taken its final objective for the day, the Courcelette Sugar Refinery – at or about seven o'clock. The gains were then consolidated and a number of prisoners were guided to the rear.

It was on that September 15, that Private Bishop was reported as *wounded & missing*.



(Right below: *Wounded troops being evacuated in hand-carts from the forward area during the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Somme* – from *Le Miroir* or *Illustration*)

The son of Benjamin Bishop and of Selina Bishop (née *Dawe*) – to whom he had allotted a monthly fifteen dollars from his pay - of Burnt Head, Cupids, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, he was also brother to Azariah, to Christopher, William, Allen, Druscilla, Elfreda, and to Benjamin\*.

*\*Some sources have the parents marrying in 1888; in fact, the wedding appears to have taken place in 1878 (from Vital Stats, Volume 38, Provincial Archives, via Larc's Genes Web-site) – in St. Augustine's Church, Burnt Head.*

Private Bishop was officially *presumed dead* by December 2 of 1917, to be reported two days later, on December 4, as having been *killed in action\** at Courcelette on that September 15 of the previous year.

(Right: *Burying Canadian dead on the Somme, likely at a casualty clearing station or a field ambulance* – from *Illustration* or *Le Miroir*)



*\*By then, for this to occur, some remains, likely such as a pay-book or even his body had surely been discovered and identified.*

Cyril Bishop had enlisted at the *apparent age* of twenty-five years and eight months: date of birth, September 11, 1889.

(continued)

Private Cyril Bishop\* was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

*(Some sources, including the Vimy Memorial – but not the CWGC – identify him as Cyril A. Bishop, but others, including his papers and copied parish records do not. In fact, a source recording 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion graves, says that the A. is incorrect.)*



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to [criceadam@yahoo.ca](mailto:criceadam@yahoo.ca). Last updated – January 27, 2023.